FFR

Issue № 170: Is My Inner Child a Demanding Roommate? And Other Interior Design Dilemmas.

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."

--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

Return Policy:
If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
please return it to us in its original condition
for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."

— Virgil, The Aeneid

The Closet of Atilla the Hun Rashly Concocts Fluid in the Broom Closet (A Liminal Odyssey Through the Cubicles of Sparkle & Shine Cleaning Supplies Inc.)

By Preston Clay

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: [Text flickers in a jagged, neon-green font, mimicking the glow of a malfunctioning office computer. The cursor pulses like a dying firefly.] **YOU HAVE ACCESSED SPARKLE & SHINE CLEANING SUPPLIES INC™** (Simulation v.7.2.1: "The Absurdity Update").

Warning: Existential parameters are unstable. Please adjust your ”Reality Buffer” settings.

User: What is the “Chronosynclastic Infundibulum”?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: A corporate jargon term repurposed by Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid, the office’s sentient water cooler.
Pablo, a 7-foot-tall humanoid with a body made of recycled toner cartridges and a voice like a broken fax machine, defines it as:

“The moment when the fluorescent lights hum in harmony with your soul’s decay, creating a wormhole to a dimension where staplers write

poetry and the breakroom microwave judges your life choices."

[A low-res animation plays: Pablo's LED eyes flicker as he dispenses lukewarm water into a cup labeled "Nihilism: Now 20% More Refreshing!"]

User: And the closet? The one with the compact?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: Ah, the closet.

In this timeline, closets are quantum filing cabinets disguised as corporate storage units. Inside, you will find:

☞A taxidermized Daphne, the office caterpillar with a pug's face, curled around a half-eaten donut.
☞A VHS tape titled "The Secret Lives of Middle Managers (Unrated Director's Cut)".
☞A single sheet of bubble wrap that, when popped, whispers "You are temporary" in 37 different languages.

The compact is not a compact. It is a temporal paradox forged by a disillusioned intern who sold their soul to a kombini vending machine. When opened, it warps reality into a liminal office space where timecards are written in haiku and the coffee creamer is sentient.

User: Why is Raj, the deputy regional sales manager, a chicken?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: Because Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid reprogrammed the office's "Corporate Hierarchy Randomizer" during a power outage.

Now, Raj is a chicken in a polyester suit, clucking motivational slogans like "Synergy is the egg that hatches success!" His tie is made of shredded TPS reports.

[A pixelated image of Raj the chicken appears, pecking aggressively at a spreadsheet while a stock market ticker tape streams across his forehead.]

User: What about the employees? The ones doing the Busby Berkeley routines?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: Ah, yes. The Cubicle Choreography Collective. After the compact's activation, the employees' repressed creativity erupted into synchronized office supply ballets.

Their routines are choreographed by Daphne, the caterpillar with a pug's face, who communicates through interpretive wriggling and a series of disapproving snorts.

The latest performance, "Filing Cabinets and the Meaning of Life," features:
☞Staplers tap-dancing to the hum of the AC.
☞Paperclips forming a mournful conga line.
☞A whiteboard marker soliloquizing about the futility of existence. [A glitchy video plays: Employees in khakis and polo shirts perform a surreal ballet with hole punchers, their movements synced to the sound of a dial-up modem connecting.] User: What happens when the compact closes?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: The simulation resets.

The closet seals itself with a sound like a vacuum cleaner swallowing a scream.

Raj the chicken reverts to his human form, but his voice remains a permanent cluck (a side effect of the "Avian Motivational Software").

The employees return to their desks, but their fingers now tremble as they type, as if the keyboard is a piano playing a requiem for their lost potential.

The compact remains on Mildred's desk, glowing faintly.
It is no longer an object.

It is a metaphor for the human condition, wrapped in a riddle, stuffed inside an enigma, and stapled to a TPS report.

[The screen flickers. A message scrolls in bold, Comic Sans font:]

SYSTEM ERROR:
REALITY//OFFICE//DESPAIR.EXE IS
BUFFERING... PLEASE HOLD.

User: And the newsletter? The “Liminal Innovation Task Force”?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: Ah, yes. The corporate surrealist manifesto.
The newsletter is a PDF that exists in a quantum state of unreadability.
Its contents include:

A pie chart titled ”The Existential Weight of Paperclip Shortages: A Visual Essay.” - A flowchart explaining ”How to Reheat Pizza in the Breakroom Microwave Without Questioning Your Life Choices.” - A crossword puzzle where every answer is ”SYNERGY” (except 17-Across, which is ”WHY?”). It is distributed via Daphne, the caterpillar with a pug’s face, who crawls through the air vents and delivers it directly into employees’ nightmares. [Daphne appears, her pug face contorted into a grimace as she spits out a crumpled newsletter. The paper unfolds to reveal a single word: ”HELP.”]

User: Is there a moral?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: In avant-garde Japanese fiction, morals are replaced with existential pop-up ads.

[A flashing ad appears onscreen:]

“Feeling lost in the corporate labyrinth?

Download our FREE eBook: ‘The Absurdity of Middle Management: A Guide to Embrace the Void.’ Click here to unsubscribe from your soul.”

The story is not a story. It is a glitch in the simulation, a reminder that your cubicle is both a prison and a playground, and the line between the two is as thin as a Post-it note. [The screen dissolves into static. A single line of text types itself:] Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: ...and remember, Mildred. Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid is always watching. And he’s running low on toner. User: What’s the secret sauce?

Pablo the Incredible Talking Humanoid: [Pauses for 7 seconds. The sound of a microwave beeping plays in the background.] 2 parts bureaucratic absurdity.
1 part digital surrealism.
A dash of grotesque (chicken/Raj hybrid highly recommended).
A sprinkle of Daphne’s existential caterpillar-pug wisdom.
Stirred—not shaken—with a stapler.
Serve in a chipped mug labeled “Employee of the Month: Kafka”.
Garnish with a Post-it note that reads:

“The meaning of life is a typo. Ctrl+Z is a lie. Also, we’re out of creamer.”

[END TRANSMISSION] [The screen fades to black. The Sparkle & Shine logo reappears, now dripping neon slime. Somewhere, a fax machine sings ”Never Gonna Give You Up” in a minor key, accompanied by the hum of Pablo’s toner-cartridge heart.]

維吉爾凱

Abundance

By Hiram Larew

Come every blackboard and mud pile
Come curved roads or weed seeds
Come twig tips or what's wicked
And back alleys and soup bowls
Come one then come all

And come hope inside sadness
Come moonlight or muskrats
Come quasars and scriptures
Or mummies and spaceships
Come card tricks and washcloths
And especially bees

Let them arrive overflowing

Followed by old barns or cousins
That come running or crawling or spinning
And then come ivy and fleas
Yes come tragic or wondrous
Like graveyards or new nests
Come doors flung wide open
By wind and lost keys
Come ribbons and wild dogs

But most of all please
Come backwards and forwards
From sudden to languish
Come awful and magic
And cussing and trees.

This poem first appeared in *The Rumen*.

The Algorithmic Apotheosis of Aisle 3

By Costantino Amon Kishore Toutatis

The hum of an overhanging back-lit sign for Hamm's Beer in Aisle 3 shimmered, a distorted symphony of buzzing lights and the faint, sweet scent of maple. Daphne, a vision in her iridescent segments and a stack of miniature Foster Grant sunglasses perched precariously on her pug-snout, held the Dolly Parton guitar-shaped syrup bottle to her forehead. A low, resonant vibration pulsed through her chitinous skull.

"Daphne," a voice, slightly slurred but sharp, cut through the hum. "Daphne, you're disrupting the synergy. This is a crucial phase of the MBA team initiative. We're optimizing cross-aisle product integration. You're... you're a rogue element in the algorithmic dance."

It was Dr. Aris Thorne, a physicist Daphne had known for years. Cerebral palsy twisted his words, but his mind, a laser-sharp instrument, was always at work. He navigated the aisle with a determined sway, his eyes, magnified by thick glasses, scanning the shelves like a battlefield of misplaced breakfast items.

"Aris," Daphne said, her voice a low, guttural purr, "the syrup is talking to me. It's a mind meld through the saccharine matrix."

Aris scoffed, a short, sharp sound. "Mind meld? Daphne, this is a retail environment. We are engaging in strategic product placement. The 'Breakfast Beverages' sign, for example, is currently misaligned. It's impacting our projected syrup sales, and the statistical probability of consumer disorientation is rising exponentially."

He gestured with a trembling hand toward the shelves, which, to Daphne's multifaceted eyes, were shifting and unfolding, revealing glimpses of other realities. The Action Alley, where the FSU Physics department's "Circus of Physics" pulsed with impossible energy,

seemed to bleed into the pancake mix, a chaotic blend of quantum phenomena and breakfast nostalgia.

"The bottle says to move the sign," Daphne insisted, her voice resonating with the bottle's hum, a strange, low-budget aria. "It's part of the codex. The unreadable text, the flickering labels, the poorly aligned barcodes... it's all a message."

"Codex?" Aris's eyes narrowed, his skepticism a tangible force. "Daphne, if you're referring to the 'Coupon Clipping' flyer, that's a promotional tool. It's designed to drive consumer engagement, not facilitate... metaphysical experiences, or whatever this is."

He pulled the flyer from behind a stack of discount pancake mix, his hand trembling as he unfolded it. "Page 42? That's the breakfast bundle deal. Two boxes of pancake mix, one bottle of syrup, and a complimentary spatula."

But as Aris's eyes scanned the page, the text began to shift, a grotesque parody of readability. The words danced and rearranged themselves, forming fragmented sentences, memories, dreams of forgotten breakfast cereals and the existential dread of discount shopping.

"The laser light show," Daphne said, her voice a low, mechanical hum. "It's not just a demo. It's a key. The static electricity, the holographic projections... they're all part of the map. The map of the liminal space between breakfast and existential dread."

Aris stared at the flyer, his usual skepticism warring with the undeniable strangeness of the situation, a surrealistic tableau of retail madness. "This... this is statistically improbable. The data suggests... no, this defies all known parameters. This is like a poorly produced public-access show about the end of breakfast."

He looked at Daphne, then back at the shifting text, then at the pulsating physics demonstrations in the Action Alley. A flicker of something – curiosity, perhaps, or a grudging acceptance of the impossible, or the sudden realization that his life had become a Hatfield and the North album cover – crossed his face.

"Alright," he said, his voice a strained whisper, a deadpan delivery of the absurd. "Let's analyze this. Let's treat this as a... a complex logistical problem. We'll optimize the aisle layout, decode the flyer's text, and correlate it with the physics demonstrations. As a team, like a badly funded, experimental art collective."

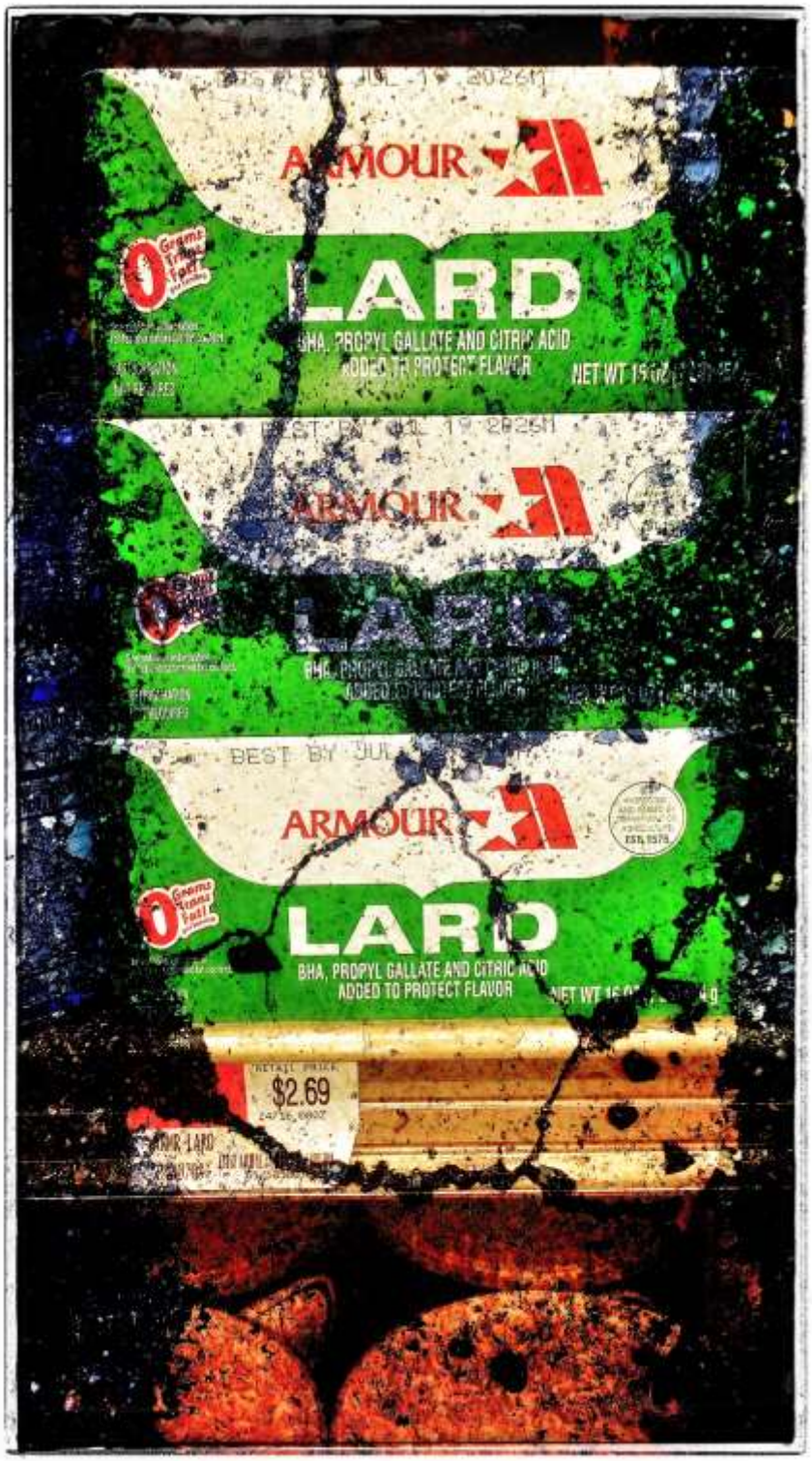
He straightened, a flicker of his old, enthusiastic energy returning, a spark of intellectual curiosity amidst the retail chaos. "We'll use your 'mind meld' as a variable. It's an anomaly, but anomalies can reveal hidden patterns, like the charm of a low-budget production."

They moved the aisle signs, Aris directing with a surprising precision, his trembling hand guiding Daphne's segmented limbs. The shelves continued to unfold, revealing hidden panels of text, each one a different font, a different layout, a chaotic symphony of retail typography. The store, under Aris's analytical eye, became a complex puzzle, a fractured codex they were determined to solve, a postmodern deconstruction of breakfast itself.

Later, as the last of the rearranged shelves settled, Aris looked at Daphne. "You know, this is a very interesting data set. I'd like to explore this further." He adjusted his glasses, a gesture of intellectual playfulness. "There's a high school football game tonight. Want to come? It's a good place to analyze crowd dynamics and the vector of the flying pigskin. It's also a great opportunity to explore the existential dread of organized sports."

Daphne smiled, a slow, pug-faced grin. "Sure, Aris. It's been a while. And I bet the concession stand has some interesting syrup."

As they walked out of the store, the hum of the overhanging back-lit sign for Hamm's Beer faded, replaced by the distant roar of the crowd, a chaotic, low-budget soundtrack. The fractured codex of the store, for a moment, had brought them together, a strange and unlikely team, united by the absurd poetry of retail and the existential hum of breakfast.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0 Grams Trans Fat!
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BHA, PROPYL GALLATE AND CITRIC ACID
ADDED TO PROTECT FLAVOR
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The Lard's Lament: A Culinary Sonnet

By Costantino Amon Kishore Toutatis

In kitchens bright where gluttons crave delight,
The humble lard commands a place so grand,
With sizzling whispers, crisp and golden light,
A magic potion made with skillful hand.
From porker's backfat, nobly rendered down,
In bubbling cauldrons of the chef's domain,
A transformation wears a savory crown—
Behold the essence that shall stake its claim.

Lard! Gotta have some, don't turn your back on lard!

“Why cower from this creamy gift?” I plea,
For every slab enhances dish and dreams,
Wouldst thou not seek the richness there to see?
With each bold scoop, indulge in buttered streams.
To roast or sauté—fry or spread with glee!
Embrace this treasure; let thine appetite scheme!

Lard! From the heavens above, sent down with soul filled love!

The ancient ways remind us of our feast,
Where lard was sacred on our grandest boards,
For every tale it tells—a savory beast—
A blend of comfort in life’s hollow hordes.
With crispy skin that gleams and flavors meld,
Let all who dine embrace this luscious gold.
From pastry crusts to biscuits proudly held,
In ample portions let thy heart be bold.

Lard! Put some in your heart, let the flavor impart!

When a Monster Truck Crashes in the Forest

By Gianina Yordanka Tiziri Weronika

Part 1: The Orono Extreme Mini Monster Truck Challenge

The Mitsubishi Delica Mini, a vehicular chimera christened "Peanut Butter Fury" (one shudders to imagine the marketing meeting), lurched over a series of arboreal obstacles, each a verdant, moss-encrusted monument to the inherent absurdity of nature. Inside, a miasma of seasoned ground beef, shredded cheddar (of indeterminate provenance), and a taco seasoning that could strip the enamel off a battleship hung heavy in the air. Grandpa Tetsuo, his facial expression a study in gustatory rapture, wrestled with a walking taco, his movements reminiscent of a sumo wrestler attempting to thread a needle. Daphne, a taxidermized caterpillar with the unsettling visage of a pug (one suspects a taxidermist with a penchant for the grotesque), perched precariously on the dashboard, her glass eyes reflecting the existential horror of her situation.

“Grandpa! Kindly desist from your epicurean digressions! We are, I believe, in the midst of a competition,” she warbled, her voice a synthesized lament.

Tetsuo, a man whose appreciation for walking tacos bordered on the pathological, ignored her. “Daphne-chan, these tacos... *ach!* The confluence of textures! It’s a culinary fugue, a gastronomic *bildungsroman*!” He paused, a stray piece of lettuce clinging to his chin like a philosophical question mark. “It’s like my mother’s *omuraisu*, but with the raw, unbridled *joie de vivre* of a demolition derby.”

GRANDPA CLAIMS TACO IS KIDNAPPED SUSHI CHEF

The ground beef, a vulgarity of 80/20, was subjected to a culinary ordeal, reaching a state of overcooked compliance. The cheddar, a pallid imitation of its Vermont brethren, surrendered to the heat, becoming a gooey, salty testament to the decline of Western civilization. The taco seasoning, a chemical concoction from "Bob's Budget Spice Emporium" (one suspects a front for a clandestine spice cartel), assaulted the palate with a smoky, chili-infused tyranny. The sour cream, a local dairy product of dubious provenance, added a tangy, almost subversive counterpoint. The lettuce, a crisp, iceberg symbol of agrarian mediocrity, provided a textural contrast that only served to highlight the overall barbarity of the dish. The foil container, a crumpled monument to disposable culture, radiated a humid warmth that mingled with the fetid aroma of the Maine forest. Each bite was a microcosm of societal decay, a culinary indictment of modern life.
(Flashback to the Marshall's Incident, Ayoade-esque)
The call, a disembodied voice from the abyss of retail management, arrived from Brenda, the Bangor Marshall's manager. "We've had... an incident. An employee, a rogue agent of chaos, has... desecrated a shipment of Michael Kors handbags with... peanut butter. It's... a tableau of sticky, nutty anarchy."

Daphne and Tetsuo, their reputation as peanut butter connoisseurs preceding them, arrived at the scene. The sight was a surrealist masterpiece: rows of designer handbags, their pristine surfaces smeared with the sticky, nutty residue of rebellion. The livestream, an accidental act of voyeurism, captured their methodical consumption, their faces smeared, their eyes glazed over with a peanut butter stupor. The resulting viral sensation, "Peanut Butter Purge," funded the Delica Mini's transformation, a testament to the internet's capacity for both the sublime and the utterly ridiculous.
"We're here! Late, naturally. Someone was engaged in the deconstruction of a walking taco. Let us proceed!" Daphne declared, her voice a synthesized pronouncement.

TAXIDERMIZED CATERPILLAR DEMANDS MONSTER TRUCK RIGHTS

Part 2: The Talking Chicken and the Tree of Life

The grand prize, a year's supply of free grilled chicken from "Clucky's Chicky Shack" (a culinary institution of questionable hygiene), was awarded to our intrepid duo. The chicken, a rare breed known as the "Yamato Gunkei" (one suspects a genetic experiment gone awry), stepped forward, its eyes gleaming with an unnerving intelligence.
"Greetings, Tetsuo-san," the chicken clucked, its voice a baritone that could rival a Wagnerian bass. "We must engage in a discourse."
Tetsuo, his jaw slack, stared at the avian oracle. "You... you possess cognition?"
"I possess insights, Tetsuo-san," the chicken retorted. "The erosion of familial bonds, the disintegration of societal norms, the avian flu as a metaphor for the collective malaise..."

(References)

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The chicken, a veritable Socrates of the barnyard, expounded on the intricacies of filial piety, the importance of intergenerational dialogue, and the existential dread of a world adrift in a sea of digital distractions. Tetsuo, his eyes reflecting a profound sense of

existential bewilderment, carved his initials into a nearby tree trunk, followed by Daphne's.

"This tree," the chicken declared, "shall stand as a monument to ancestral wisdom, a beacon in the encroaching darkness."

The racing crew, a motley collection of gearheads and taco enthusiasts, stood in a moment of silent contemplation, each placing a stone at the tree's base. The air was thick with the scent of damp earth and the lingering aroma of philosophical poultry.

TALKING CHICKEN PREDICTS END OF HUMANITY VIA BAD WIFI

Part 3: The Tree of Remembrance

The tree, now a veritable cairn of stones and initials, stood as a testament to the day's peculiar events. The air was heavy with the scent of damp earth and the lingering aroma of... well, walking tacos. Daphne, perched on Tetsuo's shoulder, watched as the racers dispersed, their faces etched with a newfound sense of... something.
"Grandpa," she squeaked, her voice unusually subdued, "I believe I have gleaned a modicum of understanding."
Tetsuo, his eyes reflecting a quiet, almost unsettling wisdom, nodded. "Yes, Daphne-chan. Sometimes, the most profound truths are found in the most improbable of circumstances, usually involving talking poultry, and gratuitous amounts of walking tacos."

BERGPORT
GOODMAN

The Worst of Bergdorf Goodman Overdrive (Two-Disc Set)

By Kelsey Hoffman

(A Transmedia Palimpsest in Three Acts, One Poem, and a Funeral for a Leg)

"This is Bloomberg Radio. You're listening to the pulse of the city, and the rhythm of retail. And speaking of retail, are you ready to experience the Bergdorf Goodman Epistemological Vortex? A place where fashion transcends mere fabric, and becomes a journey into the very fabric of reality. Imagine, if you will, a pug-caterpillar contemplating glamour, a funeral for a leg, and boxer shorts that drip with nostalgia. Only at Bergdorf Goodman. Prepare for your expectations to be...recalibrated. Visit Bergdorf Goodman, where the absurd is always in season. And now, back to the markets."

Act 1: The Display (Or "Why Is There a Pug-Caterpillar Staring at Me?")

The window was less a window than a *hermeneutic crisis* framed in gilt-edged mahogany. Kristin Cammermeyer's genius, critics had noted, lay in her ability to weaponize surrealism as a form of retail therapy—a kind of Freudian *haute couture* for the existentially bankrupt. This season's installation, however, had escalated from "chic enigma" to "ontological hostage situation."

Didier Faustino's boxing shorts—crimson satin, monogrammed with the initials *S.A.*—swayed from a clothesline of papier-mâché banana fronds. They dripped. Not with water, but with *nostalgia*, a viscous amber goo that smelled faintly of bourbon and

regret. (Proust would've wept. Or sued.) Nearby, a flea circus performed its nightly routine inside a vitrine labeled *Catalogue of Ephemera (Vol. XII: The Ambitions of Arthropods)*. The star attraction: a flea named *Marcel* executing a triple backflip on a trapeze woven from a single strand of Marie Antoinette's hair. James Agee's ghost hovered nearby, muttering about the diameter of the hoops (*"2.3 centimeters, you philistines! DOCUMENT THE PRECISE MEASUREMENTS!"*).

But the true marvel was Daphne.

Daphne was a taxidermied caterpillar with the face of a pug. She perched atop a teetering ziggurat of Polaroids—all of them featuring Paola Navone mid-laugh, her grin progressively pixelating into a Rorschach blot of existential dread. A plaque beneath read: *Daphne Contemplates the Teleology of Glamour (A Work in Progress)*. Suddenly, the Polaroids burst into flames.

"Fire is just rapid oxidation," I muttered, channeling Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* with the gravitas of a man who'd once tried to microwave a burrito. *"Like fashion, it's fleeting. Transformative. And prone to leaving third-degree burns on the zeitgeist."*

The sprinklers erupted—not with water, but with *liquid paradox*. A deluge of champagne mixed with artisanal kombucha and the tears of disgruntled MFA students cascaded over the display. The banana fronds sagged. Daphne, now resembling a soggy Muppet, detached herself from the wreckage and waddled toward a miniature replica of a Parisian *pissoir*, now repurposed as a water fountain. She lapped noisily.

A man in a velvet blazer materialized beside me. "You look lost," he said, his voice a blend of Werner Herzog's stoicism and Mitch Hedberg's drawl. *"Ever seen a Mexican general's leg get a military funeral? In a department store? No? Buckle up.*"
Before I could ask questions, the floor dissolved.

Interlude: Poem (A Fragment)
(Title: Odet to Santa Anna's Prosthetic Limb, Interrogated by Blindfolded Flâneurs)

The leg arrives in a hatbox lined with velvet, a mahogany prosthesis carved from the femur of a saint (or a sinner—histories blur when wood is polished to the sheen of a politician's conscience).

The mourners wear blindfolds stitched with sonnets. They circle the bier, humming *La Cucaracha* in reverse—a dirge for the appendage that once danced at Versailles, that kicked a cavalry horse into a ditch, that propped open the door to a brothel in Veracruz while its owner plotted the annexation of Texas.

"Why a leg?"* whispers a woman in a pith helmet. *"Why not a spleen? A clavicle? A soul?"

The leg does not answer. It has learned the virtue of silence. It has outlived its body, its war, its *raison d'être*. Now it rests, a relic in a temple of consumerist delirium, while the blindfolded mourners trip over Daphne's discarded Polaroids and mutter: *"All art is either taxidermy or arson."*

Act II: The Funeral (or "Santa Anna's Leg Demands A 21-Gun Salute in the Lingerie Department")

The scene rearranged itself with the logic of a Dalí painting edited by TikTok algorithms.

A procession of mannequins—dressed in Bergdorf's autumn collection (*"Post-Apocalyptic Prairie Chic"*)—marched through the cosmetics aisle, bearing Santa

Anna's prosthetic leg on a litter woven from vacuum cleaner hoses. A mariachi band made entirely of taxidermied armadillos played *Las Mañanitas* on kazoos. The leg itself had been dressed in a miniature general's uniform, its wooden knee joint polished to a mirror shine. A Post-it note stuck to its thigh read: *Property of the Republic of Mexico. Returned with existential caveats.*

The blindfolded mourners—recruited from a nearby *Dark Dining* immersive theater experience—stumbled after the procession, their hands outstretched like extras in a zombie film directed by Wes Anderson. One tripped over Daphne, who was now napping inside the pissoir-fountain.

"This is historically accurate,*" insisted the man in the velvet blazer, now wearing a sash that read *FUNERAL DIRECTOR / CONCEPTUAL ARTIST. *"Santa Anna's leg was buried with full honors in 1842. Well, the first time. Then they dug it up, dragged it through the streets, and reburied it. Mexico's relationship with that leg is... complicated. Like a Facebook status set to 'It's Relationship Between a Nation and a Limb, But Also Capitalism.'"*
A security guard approached, walkie-talkie crackling. *"*Sir, you can't just... hold a state funeral for a historical artifact in the...* he trailed off, noticing the armadillo mariachis. *"*Are those... real?"*

"Taxidermy is the ultimate form of recycling,*" said the Funeral Director, adjusting his blindfold. *"*Also, we're filming this for TikTok. Hashtag DecolonizeTheMannequins. Now, if you'll excuse us, the leg requires a 21-gun salute. We're using perfume atomizers. Chanel No. 5. Very meta."*

The guard sighed. *"*Just... keep the fleas under control."*

"Bloomberg Radio, keeping you informed. And now, a word about comfort. Are you tired of boxer shorts that chafe, bind, or simply fail to capture the existential dread of modern life? Then you need Didier Faustino's S.A. monogrammed crimson satin boxer shorts. They're not just underwear; they're a statement. A statement that says, 'I understand the fleeting nature of existence, and I choose to be comfortable while pondering it.' These

boxer shorts drip with nostalgia, and frankly, who among us doesn't? Visit our exclusive retailers. And remember, comfort isn't a luxury, it's a philosophical imperative. And now, back to the markets."

Act III: The Payoff (or "Daphne Achieves Nirvana, Santa Anna's Leg Opens an Onlyfans, and the Vacuum Cleaner Eats the Display")

Chaos, as they say, is a ladder.

The perfume atomizers fired. Chanel No. 5 mingled with the scent of burnt Polaroids and kombucha, creating a miasma that smelled vaguely of *regret wearing a pantsuit*. Santa Anna's leg, now mounted on a rotating pedestal, began livestreaming to an audience of 3,000 followers (*"Hey guys, welcome to Leg_acy—let's talk about amputee representation in Renaissance art!"*). Daphne, reinvigorated by the fountain's artisanal water, shed her caterpillar body in a puff of taxidermy dust and emerged as a fully formed pug, trotting toward Fifth Avenue with the nonchalance of a creature that had transcended metaphor.
The vacuum cleaner—an antique Hoover Model 814—suddenly roared to life. It began devouring the display: banana fronds, Polaroids, the flea circus vitrine, even the Post-it note on Santa Anna's leg. Its growl deepened into a baritone monologue: "Memory is dust. And I am… its custodian."

The man in the velvet blazer turned to me. "So. What'd we learn today?"

I blinked. "That history is a taxidermized caterpillar with a pug's face? That department stores are the mausoleums of late capitalism? That… vacuum cleaners have existential crises?"

He grinned, a flash of gold tooth. "Nah. The lesson is: *Why not?* A leg needs a funeral.

A pug needs a metamorphosis. A flea needs a trapeze. And Bergdorf Goodman needs... whatever *this* is. Call it art. Call it madness. Call it a Wednesday."
As we exited, the sprinklers sputtered back to life, drenching the vacuum cleaner in kombucha. It short-circuited with a sound like Samuel Beckett clearing his throat.

Outside, Daphne the pug sat atop a fire hydrant, staring at the skyline. Somewhere, Marcel the flea was executing a quadruple backflip on a strand of Marie Antoinette's hair. And Santa Anna's leg, now trending on TikTok, pondered the merits of starting a podcast.

"All's well that ends weirdly,*" muttered the Funeral Director, adjusting his blindfold.
And the city, in its infinite wisdom, shrugged and ordered another round of artisanal lattes.

Finale: A Note to the Reader

This story contains:

- **1 taxidermized pug-caterpillar**
- **1 sentient vacuum cleaner with a philosophy degree**
- **1 prosthetic leg with better social media engagement than you**
- **37 fleas (all named Marcel)**
- **0 answers (but 5-7 *really* good questions)**

Reader discretion advised. May cause:

- **Existential vertigo**
- **Sudden urges to taxidermy your houseplants**
- **A lifelong distrust of department store windows**

"*The only logical conclusion,* as the great S.J. Perelman once wrote, *"is to pour yourself a drink, light a cigar, and let the universe sort itself out. Preferably before the markdowns start."*

Footnotes

[1] Santa Anna's leg was, in fact, buried twice. The second time, they added a plaque that read: *"Here lies the leg that once danced a quadrille with the Duchess of Normandy. Also, it owes me $20."* [2] Daphne's taxidermist later opened an Etsy shop selling "transcendental plushies." They sold out in 4 minutes. [3] The vacuum cleaner's manifesto (*Dust to Dust: A Memoir in Suction*) is available for pre-order on Amazon.

Credits

Inspired by:

The Algonquin Round Table's love of chaos

- ***Twin Peaks*'s commitment to "What the hell is happening??"**
- **The inherent absurdity of writing 2,000 words about a department store window**

Special thanks to:

- **Marcel the flea (RIP)**
- **Santa Anna's leg (you quirky icon)**
- **The concept of "memory as dust" (you're doing God's work)**

THE END (Or is it?)

"This is Bloomberg Radio, signing off for the day. But before we go, a final thought. Have you ever considered the importance of a well-fitted prosthetic leg? Especially one that can livestream to thousands of followers? At 'Leg_acy' we understand that a leg isn't just a limb, it's a lifestyle. Whether you're attending a funeral in a department store, or simply navigating the urban jungle, a quality artificial leg is essential. And for those who have lost a leg or are simply looking to get a leg up in life, we have the perfect solution. And

remember, a well-made artificial leg, is a step in the right direction. And now, good night, and may your dreams be as surreal as a Bergdorf Goodman window display."

Citations

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